

viewpoint

Shortchanging the arts is a dangerous practice



BRIAN ADAMS

“This is a quality-of-life issue. We must find the resources necessary to contribute to the arts, as well as to credible and essential charitable organizations.”

Given the choice, and limited funds, would you be more inclined to make a financial contribution to the fight against cancer or to an organization that restores classic motion pictures?

One is an effort to preserve life, while the other an attempt to preserve film. In the best of times, you may have donated your resources to both. But these are not the best of times, and the question posed is an example of what many individuals and businesses are facing.

The California state budget for the 2003-2004 fiscal year allocates \$1 million for the California Arts Council (CAC). With additional funding sources for the CAC, including about a \$1 million match from the National Endowment for the Arts and another \$1 million from the sale of the California arts license plates, the CAC will receive about \$3 million.

Bruce Davis, executive director of Arts Council Silicon Valley, the largest nonprofit arts council in California, reports that nearly half of that amount will be spent on state-agency mandated expenses, salaries and operations. Arts Council Silicon Valley provides grants to area artists and organizations.

“Half the current [CAC] staff will be laid off and all statewide grant programs will be curtailed,” Davis says. “Arts Council Silicon Valley will lose approximately \$60,000 in CAC funding, including \$30,000 in general operating support — a grant we have received for the past 20 years since we were founded.”

There’s more bad news for the local arts community. Davis says more than \$600,000 in additional CAC funds will be lost to arts groups and individual artists throughout Santa Clara County.

“It will be very difficult and challenging for individual groups and artists to find replacement funding for lost CAC grants,” Davis says.

Individuals and corporations must often decide between funding arts groups or health service-related nonprofit agencies. Others, such as Applied Materials Inc., contribute to a diverse group of philanthropic endeavors, including health, education and the arts.

“Applied Materials has always viewed the arts as an important part of a creative and vibrant society and a way of strengthening common understanding in diverse communities,” says Mike O’Farrell, vice president of Applied’s global community affairs. “Similarly, we view the arts as an important part of a holistic educational process.”

When times are tough, what can be said to encourage the continual funding for the arts in our community?

“Arts and cultural programming are essential to the quality of life of all communities,” Davis says. “The more diverse a local population is, as in San Jose and Silicon Valley, the more the arts are needed to promote and celebrate that diversity. It is also incredibly relevant to the economy, in providing jobs, increasing the local and state tax base, and helping to develop and maintain tourism.”

The San Jose Convention and Visitors Bureau

agrees. A recent study conducted with American Musical Theatre San Jose indicates that its 2002-2003 season generated \$9.4 million in consumer spending.

“The arts play a significant role in both the tourism industry and our local economy,” says Dan Fenton, president and CEO of the bureau. “The arts induce consumer spending, which supports our local merchants and keeps employees working. The economic value of the arts should be recognized as a substantial revenue generator for the city.”

Davis also points out an interesting link between the arts and a healthy community.

“The Arts Council funds several health-related arts projects in the area, for seniors, children and the disabled. We have placed a special funding emphasis on providing arts activities and arts education for emotionally disturbed children and teenagers. The arts help them heal,” he says.

This is a quality-of-life issue. We must find the resources necessary to contribute to the arts, as well as to credible and essential charitable organizations. It has been said that the arts feed our soul. If so, then we become a better society and a stronger community when we are able to feed our soul, and those in need.

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